

Excerpt

Developing IT/Mobile Capacity

AMERICAN SPACES

Idea Book



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Under Secretary

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Tara D. Sonenshine

*Under Secretary for Public
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In a rapidly changing world, powered by social media and instant information, the United States must continue to be part of the world's vibrant conversations. At a time when so many of our embassies are forced by necessity to protect our diplomats, it's critical that we can go outside our compounds to engage in what Edward R. Murrow called "the last three feet—one person talking to another."

I have prioritized American Spaces as one of the most effective and vibrant forums for our public diplomacy outreach. Since the beginning of my tenure as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs I have seen exciting learning taking place in Information Resource Centers, American Centers, Bi-national Centers, and Corners where foreign audiences come to engage with us on matters of common interest.

Just as traditional libraries are evolving into dynamic community spaces, our American Spaces must be dynamic as well. Over the course of the last year many people have come together, from all over the world, to work on this idea of creating Model American spaces to showcase the types of dynamic learning centers we hope all our spaces will become.

Since we began this project our vision has been clear: to further develop American Spaces that engage audiences with compelling learning environments that reflect the dynamic nature of the United States and welcome spontaneous interaction, shared ideas and warm conversations. We have

made it our goal to provide what I call CARE for every Space: Content, Access, Resources, Evaluation and robust connectivity.

Working with experts from the Smithsonian, we have created an exciting partnership to realize that vision—and take it to the next level: advancing the role of American Spaces as symbols of meaningful relationships and commitments between the U.S. and host communities.

Through this Idea Book we will provide Posts the means to improve and standardize the quality of American Spaces and their core programs. Our aim is to provide the best multifunctional platform for public diplomacy programs to promote open dialogue, counteract negative preconceptions and build bridges of understanding. Bringing our partners and Smithsonian experts together we anticipated an explosion of ideas and practical solutions, and we had just that.

We hope you will use this Idea Book as a resource to invigorate your Spaces which are, now more than ever, one of our key platforms for advancing U.S. foreign policy through the lively sharing of information and ideas. Flexible spaces, welcoming environments and state-of-the art technology can help create opportunities for learning about America, through participatory experience, casual exchanges, and social media, breaking down barriers around the world.



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Message from the Under Secretary



Elizabeth Duggal

*Director, International Museum
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*Photo Credit: James DiLoreto,
Smithsonian Institution*

The Smithsonian is pleased to submit this Idea Book as the final deliverable of our American Spaces Assessment and Redesign Project. We hope it will serve as a guide for all American Spaces eager to refresh their facilities with a new look and new content for use by their visitors. The Idea Book contains design concepts, finishes and furnishings, and programming and IT/social media recommendations, supported by narratives explaining how our recommendations might be implemented in different types of American Spaces.

American Spaces, from my perspective, are terrific assets for this country and offer enormous opportunity. It is a great privilege for the Smithsonian to work with all of you on this important and vital project, particularly because our mission is the “increase and diffusion of knowledge.” We are passionate about engaging our visitors and our role in the world of cultural diplomacy.

From the initial discussions with State to the team visits to the American Spaces, from the design efforts to the planning and convening of the project workshop, this has been a wonderful and rewarding partnership all around. Collaboration and shared commitment have been central to this project: when our delegations visited the American Spaces

and peer institutions around the world and met with Embassy and American Spaces staff, partners, and visitors, all were unstinting in their generous contributions to the project. All of these stakeholders are key to the success of this endeavor, and ownership of the final recommendations will be in the hands of the American Spaces themselves.

We have benefited greatly from the support of our State Department partners throughout. Our ideas have been strengthened through communication and feedback, and we have all learned so much from you. On behalf of the entire International Museum Professional Education Program team and the broader Smithsonian Institution, we want to thank the State Department—particularly the Bureau of International Information Programs—for the opportunity to work on this project. Members from several Smithsonian Institution units have enthusiastically participated in the program, drawing expertise from the National Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of American History, the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), and the Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations. We look forward to the possibilities ahead and to continuing this partnership and supporting you in any way we can.



Message from the Program Director



Developing IT/Mobile Capacity

The American Spaces Assessment and Redesign Recommendations project addresses more than 800 global locations and seven specific Spaces. Each of the seven model Spaces exists in a different part of the world—within different continents and regions and within a different type of environment, from the corners of school lobbies to floors of libraries to freestanding buildings. Extending beyond the specific Spaces addressed in this design exercise, American Spaces can significantly vary in size, location, support staff, network access, physical and IT infrastructure, and maintenance capabilities.

Users visit, utilize, and maintain the Spaces due to interests in various topics, locations, events, communities, and learning English. In some Spaces, many different types of activities may happen simultaneously. In others, the Space may take on the restricted characteristics of its host location (within a library or lobby, for example). The Media/IT strategy for American Spaces needs to take into account that these are not primarily IT-centric Spaces; internet access, if a factor for use, is likely only one factor.

When thinking about suggested technological activities and infrastructure, this incredibly wide swath of options and capabilities also presents a number of IT-specific challenges.

The strength of internet access signals can vary broadly—both for wired and wireless systems. The ability for troubleshooting technical difficulties and maintenance of devices and infrastructure greatly influences the feasibility of implementation of different paradigms, and local culture regarding internet, mobile apps, and social media use can vary widely. Also, in some locations, aspects of the connectivity may be blocked. This strategy cannot assume that all Spaces possess entirely unhindered access to information, social networks, and usable connectivity.

To suggest technological programmatic paradigms, it is useful to break down the very broad task to address some specific reference points that can be applied to Spaces of various types.

In this section, we address different potential users of the Spaces, activity ideas, and key items to consider when thinking about designing an appropriate informational and technological infrastructure. We also propose a potential spectrum for implementation.



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Introduction

During the site visits¹, the team learned of three primary types of users—those who seek information (students, English language students, readers, and entrepreneurs), those who seek location (primarily young people looking for a safe, welcoming place within which to spend time with friends), and those who seek community (those looking to spend time with others with similar interests or connect with others locally, regionally, globally). The team primarily encountered users who visit the physical Spaces, but there is great potential to also create and maintain relationships with users outside of the Spaces—through email newsletters, online access to resources through a digital “membership,” events held through online services such as webinars, and social media channels.

¹ Between November 2012 and January 2013, teams from the State Department and the Smithsonian visited seven sites selected by State as model spaces for conducting our assessment and redesign work. During these visits we had the opportunity to observe users of American Spaces and speak with American Spaces and U.S. embassy staff about uses of the Spaces.



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Potential User Types

Those Who Seek Information

Suggested requirements:

Information-seekers are those who want to access and/or learn information provided by the American Spaces.

- Easy-to-use screen interfaces as entry points to access digital library information in ways that are meaningful to the local community (addressed further later in this document).
- Access to information both within the Space (on wired computers and wireless devices) and through “membership” access (addressed later in this document) online outside of the Space.
- Wireless e-reader devices that can be used within the Spaces and checked out by “members” of the Space.
- Access to e-reading materials that serve a wide range of reading abilities, including magazines, books, and comic books / graphic novels.
- If infrastructure bandwidth allows, access to online, free class curriculum information from the U.S., provided through American educational resources and iTunes U.
- Online language programming—English language conversational groups composed of intermediate or advanced speakers from Spaces regionally or around the globe. Participants could include those who are taking classes together or Space users who would welcome additional opportunities to practice their language skills.
- Programming that supports the informational resources, including series of film screenings, music listening parties, and book groups. If infrastructure allows, all of these things could happen online, as a part of an American Spaces network, if local resources do not allow for the organization and support of local groups.



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Serving the User Types

Those Who Seek Location *Suggested requirements:*

Location-seekers are those who want the American Spaces to be places within which they may spend time with friends.

- If infrastructure and maintenance allow, create areas where groups can gather around multi-touch interfaces, watch large screens or projections together, and engage with digital activities simultaneously.
- If infrastructure and maintenance allow, tie computers and devices to comfortable, open seating rather than having users face walls, looking at single-screens with their backs to each other.
- If infrastructure and maintenance allow, encourage activities that allow users to use their own mobile devices within the Space to either play/control something (in the Space) together or collaborate through their devices towards something going on in an online interface. These activities could include games, informational/news resources, collective storytelling or musical interfaces, and other possibilities, as appropriate to the interests of the individual Space.
- Provide listening stations that allow for more than one set of headphones to be plugged in at a time.



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Serving the User Types *(continued)*

Those Who Seek Community

Community-seekers are those who are looking to meet and spend time with others with similar interests, locally, regionally, and globally.

Suggested requirements:

- Interfaces that are easily navigable, highlight relevant local information, and highlight specific topics of interest to your audience on a rotating basis.
 - If infrastructure and maintenance allow, create a space within which to hold online chats and video conferencing (beyond current CO.NX programming) with other Spaces regionally and globally, as well as with the extended Space alumni network. These chats could be both event-based and support language learning.
 - Promote the Space's activity on social media channels actively within the Space.
 - Prominently display and promote a "membership" program, including digital and physical badges, membership cards, and other take-aways that serve as symbols of belonging and incentives for participation.
- Many of the requirements for those seeking location combined with an eye to the requirements of those seeking information; allow users to access meaningful information easily and together.
 - Spaces where users can contribute to the collective information both online and within the physical space, for example:
 - » Allow the community to highlight their favorite resources—digitally and physically within the Space.
 - » Encourage the community to propose and organize their own events series, where they're the storytellers and share/take away photos of themselves at the event, e.g. against backdrops appropriate to the event, to create outreach and viral marketing to those who weren't able to attend in person.
 - » Provide the ability to create virtual and/or physical collections (could be formalized as "crowdsourced exhibitions") of reading materials, memorabilia and resources related to the U.S.
 - » Enable users to curate content for each other, regarding specific topics.
 - » Create collective media archives on topics that have resonance with both the local and American culture. If culturally appropriate, allow users to contribute personal stories in relation to specific topics.



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Serving the User Types *(continued)*

Within the American Spaces, the Media/IT strategy can support an overall goal to build and maintain relationships with all types of users. Three key ways that the Spaces may do this are through connecting users to information in ways that provide meaningful access, staying connected to users beyond the walls of the Space, and connecting users to others within the American Spaces network.

Connect To Information (Provide Meaningful Access)

Significant physical and digital libraries are a part of the American Spaces program. However, the team learned that the physical libraries were often underused, as the reading level required frequently does not match the users' skill and interests. Additionally, the team learned that library digital assets are sometimes not accessed.

In order to optimize the use and usefulness of both book-based and digital library information, we propose a few things:

- Encourage use of e-books and provide materials for a wide array of reading levels.
- Allow users to take the e-book devices and downloaded ePub content home, if appropriate and licensing is available.
- Create interfaces that are simple to use, easy to learn, and allow for meaningful access points regarding topics of interest to the local community.
- Make interfaces bilingual with the local language, and, wherever possible, accessible to people with disabilities (NB: iOS—the operating system for iPads—is particularly accessible to people with low vision or who are blind).
- Make interfaces dynamic—allow for local curation of topics, and potentially community curation of recommended resources.



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Build and Maintain Relationships

Stay Connected Beyond The Walls

The physical Spaces themselves are important, but—if infrastructure allows—the digital information resources do not need to be limited to in-Space use. We propose extending connections to both information and other community members in the following ways:

Formal Information Resources

- Allow for online access to resources through digital “membership,” including at-home or on-the-go login to search within the Spaces’ systems; this could be supported through computer browser, mobile web, and/or mobile apps.
- Allow members to check out digital devices/e-readers to borrow books; members could track a “bookshelf” of what they’ve read online, save bookmarks and highlighted passages using off-the-shelf apps, and save things for later.
- Membership could allow one to earn points for use and receive special privileges and digital badges.

Email Newsletters

If not already implemented, Spaces could send out event-based and/or monthly newsletters outlining events in the Space, opportunities, requests for volunteers, and stimulating articles/materials that might be of interest to the local Space audience. Spaces could also consider user involvement in this effort.

If a Space does not have the resources to implement this, consider exploring the coordination of a program through a local embassy or organization, another regional American Space, or the State Department.

Social Media Channels

Social media can be used for marketing, broadcasting information, and general public communications. Space facilitators can use social media channels to post newsletter-like information—including events, announcements of alumni updates, and opportunities. They can also post news items relevant to the topical interests of the local Space audience.

Additionally, social media channels create and maintain active, ongoing conversations with the Space community. We suggest that each Space assess its own staff capacity for engaging in meaningful conversation with Space participants. If a more meaningful engagement is desired, but the ability to maintain the accounts is limited, we suggest that the Spaces choose to use fewer social media platforms.

In order to combine and optimize capacity to maintain these channels, we suggest that the American Spaces either create a network or network together their existing social media channels. Within the Space-wide digital resources, a master guide of links could be created and maintained, possibly in collaboration with local embassies. The simple use of common social media platforms such as Flickr Groups and YouTube channels could quickly and easily connect disparate communities to one online place.

If there is prevalent use of geolocation functions of social media channels and/or specific geolocated app services amongst local Space participants, Spaces could investigate virtually tagging (or working with users to tag) relevant locations within the local physical landscape.



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The American Spaces teams could sponsor/organize local events that leverage social media use to gather content from their audiences. Spaces teams could assist locals to use their mobile devices to collect oral histories in their community, or crowdsource an online exhibition of photos of the area from the past in comparison to today.

Connect To Others Within The American Spaces Network

During our Space visits, we heard repeated requests for American Spaces participants to have the opportunity to connect to other Spaces locally, within the region, and globally—particularly with Americans back in the States. Similar to the idea of setting up a global social media network of Spaces, IIP could explore the setup of a global network for language learning, events, and video conferencing between Spaces that have sufficient infrastructure. This network could support connection to both other Spaces and Space alumni who currently reside within the States.

During the May 2013 workshop held in Washington, D.C. as part of the Assessment and Redesign project, we learned from State department staff (from D.C. and the field) that Spaces are currently connected through a combination of listservs for staff and a video conference system. Discussions indicated that the implementation of the video conference system may have some challenges and not be ubiquitously used. If that is the case, video conferencing could be supplemented through the use of social media channels—using a-synchronous communication or through events like Tweetups that communicate in real-time. Google+ Hangouts, a free video conference utility provided by Google, may be worth investigating as an easily accessed video conference service option. It allows for 10 primary participants (from 10 locations) with the ability to broadcast to more participants through Hangouts On Air.



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Build and Maintain Relationships *(continued)*

Content, Infrastructure, Maintenance

A successful approach (and user experience) takes at least three main considerations into account—content, infrastructure, and maintenance. The content needs to be informative, easy to access, and meaningful. The hardware and software infrastructure needs to be robust—computers/devices need to consistently work, the network signal needs to be strong, and things need to not break as much as possible. Spaces should not implement initiatives (whether hardware or software) that they cannot maintain. Or, Spaces should tap into larger, networked programs through the Spaces that help them to maintain systems together. It is better to implement less and have it be reliable and robust than to have darkened screens with information trapped in an inaccessible ether.

Strength of Signal/Download Speeds

Connectivity and its usefulness are entirely dependent on the strength of the network through which the Space is connecting. If it takes forever to either connect and/or download relevant materials, the Space should emphasize low-weight, text-prominent communications and information resources that can be downloaded in one sitting rather than streamed through the network. Networked English-learning activities could emphasize writing rather than speaking skills—creating pen pals or convening through group text chat, downloading materials for film screenings overnight, or uploading user-contributed materials overnight. Internet networks in some countries can sometimes be supplemented with cell-based mobile wireless bases, so simultaneously investigating the internet and cellular infrastructure for each Space is advised.

Mobile-First

In most countries, it's more likely that a user will have a cell phone than a computer. If willing to extend beyond the walls of the Spaces, and if cell service is consistently strong within a large percentage of sites, a mobile-first ethos for software development will reach a larger global audience—whether the materials are accessed in-Space on the personal device, or accessed outside of the walls of the physical location.

Smartphone penetration (and percentage per platform) varies depending on country. If developing for multiple countries, we advise that mobile initiatives be built on mobile web rather than building for platform-specific phones. This strategy may create a variable visual experience on different phone types, but it will be more sustainable in the longer term (it will need less persistent updates with changes in operating systems and phone types) and allow content to be accessed by a wide audience.

Within the Spaces, depending on the existing hardware and infrastructure, we could consider the appropriateness of “tablet first” design for online materials. This approach would accommodate a lightweight, wireless, “sit-back and browse” platform that works well for both video and high-resolution image display. This approach also provides an experience that is optimized for a wider range of devices than a typical laptop screen, but a lesser range than the vast range of sizes and specifications for the ever-changing smartphone screens. Tablet-first design also supports an ethos to invest in more affordable, smaller hardware (in comparison to bulky desktop machines) that requires less space to store and maintain.



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Things To Consider For Infrastructure (Some Basics)

For those locations with lower smartphone penetration and/or limited cell or wireless bandwidth, text-only initiatives should be considered. Inventive SMS information resources and programming could be devised. This would work for all phone types, both smartphone and not.

Wired vs. Wireless

Strength of signal trumps in-Space user experience (if the user gives up from the incredible data lag, it doesn't matter whether it's wired or wireless). If a wireless signal can be strong, then we recommend that Spaces use wireless rather than wired as much as possible. Wireless access allows users to use their own devices and carry the Spaces' devices to more comfortable and group environments. Wireless internet access inherently pushes the users into more open and social interactions.



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Things To Consider For Infrastructure (Some Basics) *(continued)*

Within our discussions, State Department participants from both American Spaces posts and Washington expressed a desire for more productive use of the existing State Department content, an introduction to existing available Smithsonian content, and more effective ways to navigate the enormous amount of content that exists within both of these systems. Here we outline existing State resources, existing Smithsonian digital content, suggestions for how they might be optimized, and sample suggestions for content use.

Leveraging Existing State Resources

The State Department maintains a robust digital library of content, connective events system, and specific initiatives. Throughout our investigations we have consistently heard about the potential of eLibraryUSA (<http://elibraryusa.state.gov>), the State Department's portal of electronic resources for both general reading texts and English learning materials. We also learned about the CO.NX system that "carries out interactive web chats with experts on U.S. policy, society, and values, to broaden virtual reach." During our discussions, some American Spaces post participants also mentioned the State Department-provided game Trace Effects as a successful initiative. Participants described the game as easy to learn, and because it is an entirely downloaded experience, Trace Effect requires no internet connectivity for success.

Space facilitators explained to us the challenges that they face to sharing content ideas and communications strategies within a large number of communication channels. The proliferation of multiple communications channels to and between

Spaces, including multiple email listservs, makes the information less efficiently navigable, digestible, and usable. On a positive note, those channels already exist, and some optimization could help the successful implementation of the effort.

Beyond the listservs and other communications channels, the State Department and Smithsonian have identified potential Smithsonian content resources that could be used by American Spaces. This listing contains information on poster shows, digital content, and opportunities that contain a combination of the two. Based on information that we received, we understand that the outlined content resources are accessible to American Spaces teams as a part of INFOCENTRAL's PD Toolkit page at <https://connect.infocentral.state.gov/pdtoolkit/index.php/Smithsonian>. As with the other items, it appears that resources exist, but could be packaged for implementation more effectively.

While looking at existing resources, three main concerns arose: a wealth of materials are not pre-packaged and/or easily navigable; existing events communications systems (such as streaming conversations) may not be feasible to use due to limited IT infrastructure and/or local expertise; and there are too many communication channels to parse what's most useful and to discuss content packaging effectively. Post representatives repeatedly emphasized to us that they have a limited amount of staff and time. These limited resources allow them little time to put together their own, ongoing streams of content from the existing resources.



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Notes on Content

In response, we suggest multiple potential next steps for use of these resources:

- Create a more efficient interface, optimized for American Spaces use, as a portal into the eLibraryUSA resource. Earlier in the document, we recommend creating this portal as a bilingual experience, when feasible.
- Expand the connected events (and their associated resources) beyond the existing platform to allow for participation in networked events by those who are not well connected to this system due to infrastructure limitations. Earlier in the document, we mention the possibility of using social media, text-based communications, and supplementary video conference utilities to fulfill this goal.
- Assess existing communications methodologies, and—if it doesn't exist—create a communications program targeted specifically to increase the use of existing content resources.

Brief Summary of Smithsonian Content Within Existing Forms

The Smithsonian resources range from poster shows to digital content to a combination of the two. (NB: A section of the Idea Book produced as part of this project also discusses Smithsonian content available for use in American Spaces.)

The State Department suggested content list mentioned earlier in this document also highlights events open to international participation, such as the innovation competition held annually by the Smithsonian's Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation. In addition to the list's reference to museum virtual tours, online exhibitions, and materials created by both Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) and The Smithsonian Center for Learning and

Digital Access (SCLDA), the Smithsonian hosts a wealth of content freely available for use through the Institution's social media accounts. In addition to museum-specific blogs, the Smithsonian maintains accounts on YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and iTunes U; these accounts contain a range of materials including photographs, events documentation, online events information, and "classes;" all materials can be easily accessed and re-used through the Smithsonian's existing social media portal website at <http://www.si.edu/Connect>. Because the SI social media content may be easily repurposed by Spaces' social media accounts, we encourage Space facilitators to explore this media portal.

In addition, the Smithsonian Archives maintains an extensive historic photograph collection on the Flickr Commons. All images may be used with Creative Commons licenses and are posted with descriptions and useful metadata. From within Flickr itself, Space facilitators and users can post the images into their own personal media use—integrating an image into a Tumblr blog, Facebook post, tweet, email, or by using the hyperlinks and/or embed codes to integrate content into a personal website. These beautiful images provide a wide range of historic moments, portraits, and cultural imagery. They can be found at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/smithsonian/>.

The Smithsonian also maintains a publicly viewable collections site located at <http://collections.si.edu>. Though an API does not currently exist to integrate these materials directly into another digital initiative, searches of the collections can provide "galleries" of the materials that can be featured and linked to by other sites. These "galleries" could be used within in-Space presentations, featured as a screenshot to summarize a topic, and/or linked to for further digital and physical visitor investigation.



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Integration of Content Into Social Networks

Due to the easily re-usable nature of materials posted on the existing Smithsonian social network accounts, we suggest that Smithsonian content be utilized as ongoing content for American Spaces social network outreach. This can be accomplished by retweeting (on Twitter) or re-posting content (on Facebook or Pinterest), linking to content from all types of accounts, and embedding through Flickr and YouTube.

These materials would service the needs of those who seek information and community. Space staff information curators could make the re-use topic-centric or simply expose the Space community to strong Smithsonian-related content of any sort.

Mobile-optimized Data Feeds

In addition to the types of Smithsonian information mentioned in the previous section (within social networks, the Flickr Commons, the Collections site), a select number of Smithsonian-related information streams have been mobile-optimized. These data feeds could be repurposed by the State Department to be integrated into applicable app and/or mobile-web development. These feeds include:

- A complete Smithsonian Institution calendar of events
- All of the current exhibitions at the Smithsonian (each linked to an appropriate Smithsonian website)
- Access to the collections database / collections website
- A select list of 10-20 collections highlights from each Smithsonian museum

Screenings and Discussions Around Smithsonian Events

Smithsonian Podcasts and materials found within the Smithsonian's iTunes U account (both accessed through <http://www.si.edu/Connect/Podcasts>) feature programming from individual Smithsonian museums. The Podcasts provide lectures by Smithsonian experts and guests, musical performances, interviews, and documentaries. The iTunes U account includes audio and video content that describes a variety of topics. These materials could supplement the networked programming provided through the State Department's CO.NX system.

These materials would service the needs of Space users who seek both information and community; ongoing topic-centric programming could be created from these resources. A solid internet connection would be a requirement to effectively download podcasts and packaged materials (materials could be downloaded overnight if the connection is slow), while a robust internet connection would be needed for any streaming purposes.

Leveraging the Existing and Ongoing Development of the Smithsonian Mobile Development to Meet State Department Needs

The Smithsonian focuses much of its current mobile app development on the ongoing build-out of the open source platform called Roundware (<http://www.roundware.org/>). The State Department could leverage the existing development to build further for their specific needs and/or the State Department and the Smithsonian could collaborate to jointly develop new offerings that would benefit both parties.



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Suggestions For Use of Smithsonian Content

Notes on the Spectrum of Implementation

From observations during site visits and subsequent discussions with State Department colleagues, we learned that infrastructure of the Spaces range from limited reliable electricity to robust IT infrastructure. We recognize that there is limited staffing for programming and frequent challenges to building and empowering volunteer labor. Based on our conversations, it sounded like a large majority of the American spaces would fall into the Basic and Medium ranges that we describe in the following chart.

Acknowledging the information that we acquired about spaces with limited electricity and much less solid internet (or sometimes even cell) connectivity, we have chosen to begin our implementation spectrum with recommendations that address Spaces that have at least basic connectivity. We recognize that this spectrum will not then cover all Spaces, but encourage the basic level to be an aspirational goal for building the infrastructure of those Spaces that don't yet achieve the baseline.

Online vs. In-Space Activities

Online activities do not supersede in-Space activities, and vice versa. They each allow for unique opportunities and work best in complementing one another, whether by serving different purposes or carrying an activity through different components (such as being inspired by something online, creating something within the Space, and uploading it to share with others). Implementation of online activities needs to work alongside strong network connectivity and the Spaces' ability to maintain their infrastructure. Implementation of offline activities needs to work alongside strong staffing support and the Spaces' ability to promote and maintain their programming. Thinking along these lines, we provide thoughts on a spectrum of implementation within which Spaces may see themselves and target their own next steps and development. This allows Spaces to identify their current limitations and priorities, while allowing for potential aspirations towards realistic future goals.



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Spectrum of Implementation

Level	Definition	Implementation
Basic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic connectivity with a decent network connection • Very little staffing support to maintain equipment and/or programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to online resources with very usable, bilingual (to local language) interface • Access to online resources via basic in-Space computers and personal mobile device access
Medium v. 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong connectivity with a robust internet connection • Little staffing support to maintain equipment, no staffing to maintain programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to online resources with very usable, bilingual (to local language) interface • Access to online resources via basic in-Space computers and personal mobile device access • Additional activities via web and mobile only
Medium v. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong connectivity with a robust internet connection • Little staffing support to maintain programming, very little staffing support to maintain equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to online resources with very usable, bilingual (to local language) interface • Access to online resources via basic in-Space computers and personal mobile device access • Additional activities in-Space only
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong connectivity with a robust internet connection • Staffing support to maintain both equipment and programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to online resources with very usable, bilingual (to local language) interface • Access to online resources via basic in-Space computers and personal mobile device access • Additional activities that span online and in-Space



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Spectrum of Implementation *(continued)*

In addition to the general ideas presented throughout the user-types and relationship building section of this document, we provide here some specific recommendations keyed to category types.

Location-based Initiatives

Inspired by the idea of mobile American Spaces, we suggest that there could be a pilot program that concentrates on geolocated content reached (and added to by participants) via app or mobile web within public spaces. American stories could be combined with local knowledge to be accessed within appropriate physical places. This initiative could be created by using existing platforms such as Historypin (using historic photographs), created with the use of Google Maps, or as a bespoke mobile web or app experience.

For a Medium category experience, the content could be accessed solely through either digital or physical means. The digital experience could be in the form of geo-caching or another mobile-enabled playful map-based experience. Participants could gain information by exploring spaces throughout the local area and unlocking bonus content by interacting within or simply at the locations of the mobile, physical American Spaces. A purely physical experience, if staff for programming is more robust than the IT infrastructure, could rely on a physical map featured at the Space home base, with printed copies given to participants to explore beyond the Space walls, to collect and create stories in physical forms and to add to an ongoing in-space physical installation of map-based information.

For a High category experience, the digital and physical elements could be combined. Programming could support the dissemination of information about local sites (beyond the content provided within the digital, mobile experience). Programmed group excursions could encourage Space visitors to explore the local area together (accessing and creating stories digitally but in collaboration with one another). Digital stories created through the initiative could be presented back in the physical Space.

Within Libraries, Optimizing the Internal Space

In discussions with Mexico-based Space staff, we learned about the potential future development of a mobile device AR app that would help new staff and users learn the layout of the library location. For a Medium category Space with strong IT support, perhaps the AR app could evolve over time to include new content—each new “layer” concentrated on new, thematic information that could be further explored within the library resources. If this were implemented within a High category Space, each layer launch could be combined with thematic events.

Combining Staff Resources, Digitally

The Oman-based team requested connections to other Spaces (both regionally and globally) and more programming support. The combination of the two needs could inspire a pilot program to share staff resources digitally. With a Medium to High category level of infrastructure, the Spaces could test the usefulness of regional and/or global “office hours” via text chat or video, where students could access mentors based at other Spaces when there are not research fellows based in the local area.

Specific Programming Ideas For Potential Online And Online + In-Space Activities



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Book Club

The team from Romania requested both strong, packaged content and ideas for “inhabiting the space” better. Combining resources found both within the State Department’s eLibrary-USA and the Smithsonian’s collection materials, content packages could be suggested for an ongoing book club initiative. Texts would be chosen to reach an appropriate local reading level. Supplementary discussion materials could be created to target different levels of fluency. Select Smithsonian images, videos, audio, and other related content could be collected together for Space facilitators to present through discussions and/or for individuals to follow along on their own. If a calendar for this book club and the associated content were distributed to all Spaces simultaneously, there could be opportunity to have regional or global Tweetups, Google+ hangouts, and/or email groups to discuss the books in a more networked way. At minimum, a Medium category level of infrastructure would be necessary to access and/or download the eLibraryUSA and Smithsonian content. Networked programming could be as infrastructure intensive (video chats) or not (the use of Tweetups, an email discussion group) as the infrastructure allows.

Access Stories from Main Street Via Mobile, Possibly Make It Global

The Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street program brings museum-quality exhibits to small town spaces (<http://www.museumonmainstreet.org>). The associated Stories from Main Street app (<http://www.storiesfrommainstreet.org>) presents stories of life in small town and rural America. App users may also contribute their own stories of their own hometowns. User contributions are added to the app experience, creating a multi-faceted portrait of American life.

The Stories from Main Street app exists as immediately available content. With additional budget and effort, the app could potentially be expanded to include a more global view of Main Street—where American Spaces participants could practice their English and add local stories to the existing (and increasing amount of) American stories. This initiative would require additional development to the Stories from Main Street app and would require solid cell signal infrastructure in the local area, but would require little within a Space itself. With Medium category infrastructure that could support programming, the initiative could be launched through events addressing the idea of Main Street in both America and locally. With limited programming support, participation in the digital program could be encouraged through the use of static materials within the Space. With a High category of infrastructure, a robust thematic program could be created to promote and discuss the initiative through both physical and digital means.



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Specific Programming Ideas For Potential Online
And Online + In-Space Activities (*continued*)

The activities described throughout this section fall into three main categories: access, contribution, and connection of information and/or with others. Our recommendations suggest that a combination of easy-to-use interfaces, access to a wide range of information, the encouragement of Space-users to contribute their own stories and information, the ability to access information beyond the physical Spaces through spatial “membership” programs, and catalyzing connections between Spaces, whether through connected social media accounts and/or face-to-face video chats, could significantly support the American Spaces program mission. The refinement of existing resources combined with targeted new initiatives would support the distribution of resources and creation of a networked, global community for those looking to learn more about and connect to the United States of America.



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Conclusion